

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 17th November 2014

Present: Councillor J Oakes (Chair)
Councillors, Bleakley, Creaser, Hughes, Kempson, Procter and Sandiford

In Attendance: Emma Hussain, Principal Policy Officer
Ian Walker, Service Assurance Officer
Tamzin Percival, Parks and Open Spaces Manager
Jenni Cook, Committee Officer
Councillor Lamb, Portfolio Holder for Operational Services and Development Control
2 members of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr Keith Pilkington (co-opted member). Councillor Hughes queried the attendance of the Co-opted Member and it was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer would look into this.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS

Resolved:

That the minutes of the last meeting held on 22nd September 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair agreed to deviate from the Procedure for Public Speaking and allow the members of the public to ask questions as the reports were discussed.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair informed Members that at the last meeting the Committee asked for feedback on a number of items and therefore these have been circulated at the meeting as appendices. In relation to Appendix 1 regarding the Maternity/Paternity Statement, the Chair asked that members agree that the statement be proposed to the Remuneration Panel for inclusion in the Member's Allowance Scheme.

In relation to the list of empty homes circulated to Members at the last meeting, a question was raised by the public as to whether the public could have sight of the empty homes list. Following legal advice, the Committee were informed that the Council had taken the decision not to disclose details of empty properties owned by individuals under the Freedom of Information Act, as to do so would disclose personal information.

The Council must abide by the provision of the Data Protection Act and it would be neither fair nor lawful to supply a list of empty properties. Similarly the Council would consider that there is a significant degree of concern for individuals if the fact their property was empty comes into the public domain with the possibility that such properties could be targeted by criminal activity to the detriment of the owner.

The Chair noted that Councillors could contact the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager with concerns about individual properties.

The Chair updated Members with regards to the last quarterly report – the relocation of the Bank Street CCTV had been successfully completed and the transfer of the 0845 number would be reported on in the Quarterly report.

7. COUNCIL TAX BILLS

At the request of the Committee in July 2014, the Service Assurance Officer presented a draft copy of the proposed Council Tax bill and leaflet which was to be distributed to all households throughout the Borough in early 2015.

There was discussion around the need to highlight to the residents of the Borough on Council Tax bills the possibility of payment over a 12 month period, instead of just 10 monthly payments. The Service Assurance Officer informed Members of the parts of the bill and accompanying leaflet that were statutory. It was noted that there was the possibility of putting a one line statement on the bottom of the bill, however this would be limited to around 75 characters. Major changes to the bill and leaflet would incur charges, as this would entail software changes and would not form part of the current contract.

Discussion took place on collection rates and payment over 12 months and it was noted that the 2 months where no payments were taken provided 'breathing space' for residents who were struggling to pay their arrears. In response to a query from a member of the public, the Service Assurance Officer noted that a council tax bill is not valid unless it contained 10 monthly payments.

Resolved:

1. That information regarding 12-monthly payments/assistance for those struggling would be contained within the bill, in capital letters.
2. That the Council would promote the option to pay in 12-monthly installments and assistance for those struggling to pay via social media and the Council's website.

8. QUARTER 2 INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT (JULY- SEPTEMBER 2014)

The Principal Policy Officer presented the Council's performance report for Quarter 2 (July to September 2014), which showed that the Council was performing well, with 98.2% of its business plan actions on track and 68% of performance indicators green in status, however this was less than the same period last year (79.3%) and the previous Quarter (76%). It was noted that there was a mistake on page 2 of the Committee report in that that performance indicator amber and red figures in the table at 4.1 were the wrong and should be swapped round. This would be rectified in the online version.

A number of performance indicators had exceeded target and some of these were as follows:

- Customers in the One Stop Shop were waiting 1 minutes 31 seconds less than targeted, which was pleasing considering the changes to the welfare reform system which continues to see higher enquiry rates
- The number of people accessing STAN was over double the target figure of 150 with 352 people actually seen
- Percentage of council tax collected finished above target at 57%
- Percentage of work days lost to sickness was 2.48 days under target
- All planning application determined on time have continued their strong performance with all 3 application types (Minor, Major, and Other) finished quarter 2 significantly above their targets
- Time taken to process Council Tax Benefit, change in circumstance, has continued to perform well, coming in 2.7 days under target
- Residual Household waste collected has performed well this Quarter, coming in 6kg per household under target

There were 2 out of 25 performance indicators this Quarter that were behind target and action plan for each of these had been completed by the appropriate officer, with actions being taken to improve performance. The Committee would continue to monitor these targets. The move of the 0845 number was ongoing and therefore an amber action.

The Principal Policy Officer informed Members of the changes to three Risks in Quarter 2, with Ops 1 and Ops 2 which had moved from Amber to Red in status to reflect review and recommendations from committee in September that these are external risks with no direct control, and Plan 7 had changed from Green to Amber to reflect the increased number of applications the Planning Team had received and were anticipating.

Overall the majority of the Council's risks set out in the risk register were identified as low risk (green), with 5 medium risks (amber) and 2 high risk (red).

A number of questions were raised by Members which the Principal Policy Officer answered. Discussion took place regarding complaints and compliments and clarification was requested on the definition of a complaint. It was agreed that the Committee and Member Service Manager would be asked to provide information in

the Members Bulletin regarding how a complaint could be logged, e.g. escalation from a member enquiry to complaint. The Portfolio Holder for Operational Services and Development control agreed to speak with Councillor Sandiford regarding a specific issue after the meeting.

A member of the public queried the risk Plan 1 identified on page 56 with regard to the Local Development Framework (LDF) and it was noted that this was on track and referred to the whole project, not individual segments of it. It was noted that a further update would be available in the Quarter 3 report.

Members noted that the Quarter 2 celebrating success update that had been circulated to Officers and Members earlier that day was a good idea and asked that this continue. It was noted that this is also published on the performance management page of the website.

Resolved:

1. That Corporate Scrutiny notes the levels of performance and risks as detailed in the report.
2. That Corporate Scrutiny continues to monitor the corporate risk register and the performance of those actions and performance indicators that are under-achieving target levels of performance.
3. That the Committee and Member Services Manager be asked to provide information to Members regarding the complaints process and how Members can have their enquiries escalated to a complaint.

9. PARKS AND OPEN SPACES UPDATE

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager asked members to consider the results of feedback received during 2014, following the changes to the Parks and Open Spaces service.

In winter 2013/14, a number of changes to the grass cutting and grounds maintenance schedules were agreed at Cabinet, with a formal request that feedback resulting from those changes and any suggested alterations to that schedule to be brought back to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee for consideration and comment.

The changes were implemented and throughout the grass cutting season feedback had been recorded and reviewed through a number of sources, including resident service requests and enquiries, formal complaints, member enquiries, MP enquiries and grounds maintenance teams.

The report presented to members provided details of the main points of concern or query from residents, with suggested alterations identified following the feedback received.

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager highlighted to Members that at any time resources presented a challenge, then sites such as parks, gardens, play areas and cemeteries would take priority over amenity and public realm sites.

Although some changes had been suggested, the next grass cutting season could still present issues and therefore further alterations may occur, the extent and nature of which would have to be determined as and when necessary.

A number of questions were raised by both the Committee and members of the public, which the Parks and Open Spaces Manager responded. It was noted that the costs associated with additional machinery, equipment and wear and tear had levelled out and that these cost did not outweigh the savings achieved. It was further noted that changes had been implemented with regards to perimeter cuts as a result of feedback received from staff, members and the public.

Members welcomed the proposal to start cutting the grass earlier in the year in April and the Parks and Open Spaces Manager outlined the process to follow if people wished to obtain a licence to cut council-maintained grass in their area.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Corporate Scrutiny Committee notes the update to the grounds maintenance schedules as detailed in the reports and recommend its approval to Full Council in December.
2. That the Corporate Scrutiny Committee recommend to Full Council that all future amendments to the Parks and Open Spaces service to be delegated to the Head of Operations, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

The Chair informed Members that The Parks and Open Spaces Manager would be leaving the Council early in 2015 and the Committee thanked her for her hard work over the past 7 years.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and finished at 7.40pm

Signed
(Chair)

Date.....